

whether to proceed with criminal investigations. The list goes on and on. Eric Holder has demonstrated throughout his entire career the type of independence we need in the next Attorney General of the United States.

Let me give you one example. When the Independent Counsel who was investigating the President of the United States asked for additional authority, Eric Holder was the one who made that recommendation to proceed even though it was not popular at all with the President of the United States. It is that type of independence that we need in the next Attorney General of the United States. He brings broad experience as former judge, former U.S. attorney, and from the private sector.

We need to take politics out of the Department of Justice. During the Bush administration, we found that politics was very much interwoven into the personnel decisions made within the Department of Justice affecting career attorneys. That was not permitted, but it was done. We need the next Attorney General to be one who will make sure politics has no place in those types of personnel decisions.

Again, Eric Holder's career has shown his willingness to carry out his responsibilities in a nonpolitical way. He has handled major public corruption cases as a U.S. attorney against both Democrats and Republicans. He understands the responsibilities of the Department of Justice.

We need our next Attorney General to reestablish the premier role of the Department of Justice in the Civil Rights Division. The Civil Rights Division historically has been the key agency to protect the civil rights of the people of this Nation. We need the next Attorney General to reestablish that in the Department of Justice. Once again, Eric Holder has demonstrated that sensitivity that will restore the role of the Department of Justice in protecting the voting rights of all Americans.

The list goes on and on and on. Bottom line, the next Attorney General must restore the reputation of the Department of Justice. I believe he is the right person, but it is not only me. Let me read from some of the record that has been presented to the Judiciary Committee.

Both law enforcement and civil rights groups support Eric Holder. The Fraternal Order of Police writes that:

Our members reported that they found Judge Holder and U.S. Attorney Holder an able and aggressive prosecutor.

The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, which is a group of our major civil rights advocates in this country said:

Mr. Holder's various experience as a trial attorney, judge, prosecutor and lawyer in private practice make him uniquely qualified to run the Department of Justice. It would be difficult to find a candidate more experienced in the Department or better suited to lead it. His background will render him ready to lead the Department from day one. His even-mindedness and sound judgment will ensure that justice is dispensed

fairly and equitably. His professional accomplishments and ability to put partisan politics aside make him above reproach. His commitment to the rule of law makes him the ideal candidate for the nation's top prosecutor.

Now, that is the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, which, again, is comprised of the premier groups in this country that are out there fighting for the rights of the people of this country.

I would also draw my colleagues' attention to a January 7, 2009, letter received by the Judiciary Committee from several former high-level Department of Justice officials in the Republican administration. They write:

We are pleased to be able to write in support of Eric Holder, a man who stands with the most qualified who have been privileged to be nominated to be Attorney General of the United States. President-elect Obama's nomination of Eric as the historic appointment of the first African-American Attorney General should be hailed as a milestone. He is an extraordinary lawyer and an even better person.

We need to move forward immediately in the leadership in the Department of Justice. I would urge my colleagues, let us move forward on the confirmation process as quickly as possible. I look forward to Eric Holder being the next Attorney General of the United States. I hope we will do that very shortly.

I yield the floor and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WHITEHOUSE.) The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida is recognized.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator will suspend for one moment.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

DESIGNATING CERTAIN LAND AS COMPONENTS OF THE NATIONAL WILDERNESS PRESERVATION SYSTEM

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S. 22, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 22) to designate certain land as components of the National Wilderness Preservation System, to authorize certain programs and activities in the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Reid amendment No. 15, to change the enactment date.

Reid amendment No. 16 (to Reid amendment No. 15), of a perfecting nature.

Motion to recommit the bill to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, with instructions to report back forthwith, with Reid amendment No. 17, to change the enactment date.

Reid amendment No. 18 (to the instructions of the motion to recommit), of a perfecting nature.

Reid amendment No. 19 (to Reid amendment No. 18), of a perfecting nature.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida is recognized.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(The remarks of Mr. NELSON pertaining to the introduction of S. 22 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced bills and Joint Resolutions.")

RECESS

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess under the previous order.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 12:31 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. CARPER).

DESIGNATING CERTAIN LAND AS COMPONENTS OF THE NATIONAL WILDERNESS PRESERVATION SYSTEM—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico is recognized.

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SANDERS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to proceed as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ISRAEL AND GAZA

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I am here today to speak about the growing violence in Gaza. I support the United Nations Security Council resolution calling for an immediate and durable cease-fire. In my view, both the Israeli airstrikes and the Palestinian rocket attacks must stop immediately, and Israeli ground forces should withdraw from Gaza. I regret that President Bush chose to have the United States be the only Security Council member not to support this U.N. resolution.

I ask unanimous consent that the full text of the U.N. resolution be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.